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PP RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHMR RUEHPA RUEHRN RUEHTRO
DE RUEHUJA #2004/01 3061736
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 021736Z NOV 09
FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7390
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS PRIORITY 2213
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002004

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/FO, AF/W, AF/RSA, DRL, INR/AA;

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/14/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT YAR'ADUA EXPOUNDS ON NIGER DELTA,
ELECTORAL REFORM, AND ANTI-CORRUPTION EFFORTS

REF: ABUJA 1962

Classified By: Ambassador Robin Renee Sanders for reasons
in Sections 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) During President Yar'Adua's October 27 demarche (reftel) on seeking USG and UK help in completely overhauling the country's Independent National Election Commission (INEC), the Nigerian head of state also briefed on his views on the Niger Delta, where he hopes the post-amnesty efforts would lead, and explained the country's anti-corruption efforts. He highlighted the Niger Delta Amnesty Program as a success and noted that the GON would soon present its rehabilitation and reintegration plans on education, training, and infrastructure development to the National Assembly with requests to fund these programs over the next five years. On GON anti-corruption efforts, Yar'Adua claimed that the EFCC's independence remained important to him, so that the institution would not be used as a political tool, noting that he worked hard in this direction. Overall, we have seen the fragile success of the Niger Delta amnesty program, but rehabilitation plans appear to be slow and disorganized, with the donor community concerned about progress. That the EFCC is doing more and improving remains a common refrain of the GON with little to show to support this claim, other than more active follow up of bank fraud investigations. END SUMMARY.

NIGER DELTA

¶2. (C) The Nigerian President thanked both the USG and UK for their recent statements on the Niger Delta amnesty program. Yar'Adua said, thus far, the amnesty has brought peace to the region and that he expected the post-amnesty program on rehabilitation and reintegration (R-and-R) to be fully developed by the end of November, so that he can present it to the National Assembly and the Council of State (COS). He said he had briefed the leadership of the various "militant" elements in the Niger Delta on the post-amnesty R-and-R plans, and he claimed that they all remained on board for the education and training programs. Yar'Adua said his goal with the post-amnesty program was not only to preserve the current

enabling environment that has resulted from the amnesty, but to capitalize on it so that the region can have sustained peace. He said that, if the GON could sustain peace in the Niger Delta for at least one year with the R-and-R program, then the region would have turned the corner toward sustainable peace and development. Yar'Adua highlighted the following specifics on key areas that he wanted to include in any R-and-R program. Of note, he said he had emphasized to "militant" and community leaders the importance he places on empowerment through joint ownership of oil assets by the communities, including taking part in the proposed, new joint venture structures. He added that these two ideas appealed to both the militant and community leaders.

13. (C) Yar'Adua's second area of focus for the R-and-R program involved infrastructure development. He described his desire to complete the rehabilitation of the East-West Highway, and afterwards begin construction of the Coastal Highway and the coastal railway running from Calabar to Port Harcourt and on to Yenagoa, Benin, and Oyo. Yar'Adua added that these infrastructure projects remained vital for trade and development and he would push to have them completed. The second phase of the railway rehabilitation, he stated, would occur between Benin and Lagos State. As for the waterways, the Nigerian President added that he hoped to begin dredging of the creeks to improve the riverine transportation system, start projects to help the environment, and reclaim land to build new towns in the marsh areas. Yar'Adua said that the GON would finance this Niger Delta rehabilitation plan over a period of five years. He claimed that he had already engaged in discussions with the

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National Assembly to provide nearly 750 billion naira (about five billion U.S. dollars) in the budget every year for these projects until their completion. All of this, Yar'Adua stated, he had reviewed with the community leaders and "militants" and that they all remained in agreement with his vision of both short-term steps and these longer-term projects.

14. (C) Yar'Adua admitted that some individuals and "forces" in Nigeria did not want the amnesty program to succeed, particularly those involved in oil bunkering and other criminal activities. There were daily efforts trying to sabotage the program and the R-and-R plans. He asked that "friends of Nigeria" remain patient and appreciate that he is quite focused on bringing lasting peace to the region and is working hard toward this goal.

ANTI-CORRUPTION EFFORTS

15. (C) Yar'Adua also briefed on his views on current GON efforts against corruption. The Head of State claimed that he felt that there was a continued "misunderstanding in the international community as regards to his commitment in the fight against corruption." He added that what he told the Secretary of State and Prime Minister Gordon Brown remained the same -- he was committed to stamping out corruption. The Nigerian President continued by highlighting that the EFCC was the key GON institution that carried the anti-corruption mandate. Therefore, he was committed to its independence and ensuring that it was not being used as a political tool and that it would fulfill its role as a deterrent to corruption. He also wants the EFCC's capacity to be strengthened so that it can ensure that other government processes are not being abused, such as in the areas of procurement and regulations. Yar'Adua informed the two Chiefs of Mission that he had established an "independent committee" to review procurement and regulations to further thwart abuses of power and resources.

COMMENT

¶6. (C) President Yar'Adua's comments about his commitment against corruption do not contain anything new, despite that his words do not match many visible deeds on the ground, except for more engagement by the EFCC in investigating recent banking scandals. On Niger Delta, most donors, as well as the U.S. Mission, agree that the amnesty has gone better than expected in the short term. We all remain concerned, however, about next steps in the fragile peace, particularly if tangible evidence of next steps on rehabilitation and reintegration are not seen in the near term by the communities and the "militants."

SANDERS